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ABSTRACT

This paper presents results of a research project which explored how veteran teachers and administrators compare and contrast the effectiveness and quality of recent teacher education graduates in relation to that of experienced teachers. Data were sought from a national sample of experienced principals and teachers on selected characteristics, competencies, and abilities of pre-1983 and post-1988 graduates, The study utilized an original three-part instrument which included an opportunity to comment on the reasons for the differences between the two groups. The 500 respondents rated post-1988 graduates significantly higher than pre-1983 graduates in the following areas: (1) understanding of the nature and structure of relevant subject matter; (2) ability to individualize instruction; (3) ability to organize the classroom to create a positive environment for student learning; (4) providing enrichment within courses taught or in curricular areas; (5) working with students and parents of different cultures or races; (6) teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills; (7) establishing high expectations for students; and (8) motivating all students to their maximum potential. Pre-1983 graduates were rated higher in only one area, namely, modeling and expecting correct usage of standard English. The survey form is appended. (IAH)

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THE COMPARATIVE QUALITY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS AS PERCEIVED BY EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

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THE COMPARATIVE QUALITY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS AS PERCEIVED BY EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

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During the last 15 years, questions about the quality of teachers' effectiveness have been prevalent among business leaders, teacher educators, aspiring and practicing policy makers, IHE administrators, and the media at large. Relatedly, a number of reports, commissions, studies, and articles in the general media have suggested that the quality of teachers entering the field has deteriorated and that teacher education is ineffective. Parents of school-aged children, and the society at large, have a need to know how recently prepared teachers compare to the more experienced teachers. Unfortunately, no systematic effort has been undertaken to determine what experienced teachers and administrators, who have observed recently prepared teachers, say about the newest generation of teachers. Consequently, the following national research project was begun in November, 1990.

The objective of the research project was to explore how veteran teachers and administrators compare and contrast the effectiveness/quality of recent teacher education graduates to that of experienced teachers. Data from a national sample of experienced principals and teachers on selected characteristics, competencies, and abilities of pre-1983 and post-1988 graduates were sought. The study utilized an original three part instrument which was subjected to a pilot-test and subsequently modified (see Appendix I). Part I was comprised of nine items to facilitate comparative judgments on the characteristics, competencies and abilities of pre-1983 graduates and post-1988 graduates. Ratings were obtained on (1) understanding of the nature and structure of relevant subject matter, (2) ability to individualize instruction, (3) ability to organize the classroom to create a positive environment for student learning, (4) modeling and expecting correct usage of standard English, (5) providing enrichment within courses taught or in curricular areas, (6) working with students and parents of different cultures or races, (7) teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills, (8) establishing high expectations for students, and (9) motivating all students to their maximum potential. In Part II, the respondents rank ordered the nine statements by listing the three greatest strengths and the three most serious weaknesses for each group of teachers. Additionally, they were asked to provide a general overall comparative rating, using a five point scale, as to the quality of their preparation. General qualitative comparisons were solicited in Part III by asking the respondents to explain or describe differences between today's first year teachers and those prepared prior to 1983 in terms of their ability to teach effectively.

Sixty deans of education from all sections of the nation assisted with this nationwide project. These deans were from institutions

of varying size and included both private and public universities. The deans identified four veteran principals, two elementary, one middle school and one high school. These principals were asked to complete the instrument and have two veteran teachers from each school. Additionally, forty-five school systems in Mississippi and Louisiana were also included in the response group.

The data obtained have provided profile information on recent graduates as contrasted to those graduating prior to 1983. The 500 respondents rated post-1988 graduates significantly higher than pre-1983 graduates in the following areas:

understanding of the nature and structure of relevant subject matter,

ability to individualize instruction; ability to organize the classroom to create a positive environment for student learning,

providing enrichment within courses taught or in curricular areas,

working with students and parents of different cultures or races,

teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills,

establishing high expectations for students, and

motivating all students to their maximum potential.

Pre-1983 graduates were rated higher in only one area, namely, modeling and expecting correct usage of standard English.

In Part II of the survey instrument, the respondents were asked to list in rank order, the three greatest strengths and the most serious weaknesses for each group of teachers. The three greatest strengths for the pre-1983 teachers were:

understanding of the nature and structuring of relevant subject matter,

understanding and modeling from students the correct usage of standard English in writing and speaking, and

organizing classrooms to create a positive climate for student learning by maintaining a productive focus.

The greatest weaknesses of the pre-1983 teachers were:

individualizing instruction through appropriate materials, content, activities and goals in accordance with each student's learning needs,

teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills, and

working with students and parents of different cultures or races.

The greatest strengths of the post-1988 graduates were:

understanding of the nature and structure of relevant subject matter,

organizing the classroom to create a positive climate for student learning, and

establishing high expectations for students which is predicated on a conviction that all students can learn.

The weaknesses listed for the post-1988 graduates were:

modeling and expecting from students the correct usage of standard English in writing and speaking,

teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills, and

motivating all students to their maximum potential.

An analysis of the general overall rating data revealed that, in general, principals' ratings of the post-1988 teachers were somewhat higher than the ratings the pre-1983 teachers gave themselves. Seventy-seven percent of the principals, when comparing pre-1983 teachers to post-1988 teachers, indicated that the latter were better prepared. When the teachers' ratings are used solely, sixty-one percent of them rated the post-1988 teachers to be better prepared than the pre-1983 group.

Since over 60% of the respondents included written comments, Part III of the instrument provides considerable insight on teacher quality. Respondents offered elaborated, narrative statements which were surprisingly rich and numerous as in they compared the relative effectiveness of more experienced and less experienced teachers. An elementary principal wrote, "Today's first-year teachers are beginning to get more training in multiculture-gender fair-disability awareness, learning styles, cooperative learning, integrated curriculum, and effective teaching methods based on research. They come with a broader base of knowledge of students and teaching techniques." A middle school teacher commented, "today's first-year teachers are definitely better organized and

seem better prepared to meet the demands of teaching today's students. New teachers are better prepared with methods for maintaining discipline. They also seem better able to teach the subject matter involved. They realize the importance of thorough preparation by the teacher."

Some additional selected salient comments follow:

> "I see the "new breed" of teachers from the "Space Age" as being less committed to their position. Many see it as a "job" rather than a "calling". Other priorities often take precedence over their teaching obligations. (This is also true of jobs other than teaching). Many teach primarily to the average and above average child. "They" do seem to use more materials and rely a lot on modern technology to aid them (computers, overhead projectors, etc.). These can be beneficial if used appropriately."
>
> "Today's first-year teachers are better prepared because of major changes in the college curriculum. College classes are focusing more on how to actually teach a child and on the skills that will be needed to be productive in the classroom. Today's teachers need to have a wide variety of hands on ways to teach each skill in order to meet <u>all</u> students potential."
>
> "As a general rule, those teachers prepared before 1983 have a more thorough knowledge of subject matter and tend to stress critical thinking and problem solving skills more than the post-1988 graduates. On the other hand, the latter seems to be more flexible in individualizing instruction, providing enrichment activities and demonstrating skill in working with students of all backgrounds."
>
> "The difference between today's first-year teachers and those prepared prior to 1983 in terms of their abilities to teach in my opinion are: (1) today's first year teachers are provided an opportunity to explore the ideas of all people, everywhere, past and present, (2) an opportunity to participate fully in our society, (3) an opportunity to share more experiences and investigate more interests, (4) and an opportunity for persons to achieve fulfillment and become informed decision makers, capable of shaping the future of society. Teachers prior to 1983 have not been fully given those opportunities."
>
> "Today's first-year teachers possess many of the qualities that make a "good" teacher that were seldom seen in earlier years. The teachers of this era have the ability and knowledge to organize a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning for each student. The focus is on individual needs versus group needs. Areas are designated in each classroom for remediation and/or enrichment to motivate

individual students. Due to the new and innovative programs the quality and ability to teach has vastly improved."

"Today's first-year teachers lack a thorough knowledge in the basic subject areas. They seem to be uninformed about issues in their own lifetime. This lack of general information or awareness may come from not having read a variety of books, magazines, and newspapers."

The findings are quite different from those being promulgated by various policymakers and others. The data base, if appropriately utilized, has the potential for affecting responsive policy decisions pertaining to preparation programs within the university, in legislatures and higher education boards. This may be especially true when the schools and teachers are under attack by the media, by business and industry, and by the government. Teacher educators should also use this information for program review and modification purposes. The researchers will be undertaking further analyses.

Reference Notes

Dwight Hare, College of Education, Mississippi State University, provided consultant advice on the descriptive statistics design used in the study and did the computer analyses of the data.

January, 1991

TO: Selected Principals and Teachers

FROM: Arnold J. Moore, Mississippi State University
David A. England, Louisiana State University

SUBJECT: The Comparative Quality of Beginning Teachers as Perceived by Experienced Principals and Teachers

Our recent experiences in K-12 school systems as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Board of Examiner (BOE) team members, and in other settings, have resulted in our hearing numerous comments about the quality of current beginning teachers. Although the Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1990, obtained information from the new teacher, there has not been a systematic effort to obtain data from experienced principals and teachers as to the relative quality of recent graduates of teacher education programs who are currently teaching. Thus, we have undertaken a nation-wide project entitled, "The Comparative Quality of Beginning Teachers as Perceived by Experienced Principals and Teachers", to obtain such data. These findings will provide a dimension which is absent from the data reported by John Goodlad in Teachers for Our Nation's Schools.

Enclosed, you will find a short survey instrument which has been developed for this project. Its primary purpose is to gather data on experienced principals' and teachers' perceptions of today's beginning teachers as compared to teachers who were prepared before publication of the Nation at Risk (1983). Secondary purposes are to give principals and experienced teachers an opportunity to elaborate upon or explain differences between today's first year teachers and their earlier counterparts, and to solicit principals' and teachers' opinions on some major directions teacher education might take in the future. Please complete a copy of the instrument and ask two teachers in your building who have taught ten or more years to do the same. Anonymity will be assured.

Any open-ended comments you may offer, along with the more quantifiable responses, will be most appreciated and useful. If you want a copy of our findings, please so indicate by providing us with your name and address. Thank you for your participation.

AJM/DAE:ll

Enclosure

A SURVEY OF
THE COMPARATIVE QUALITY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS
AS PERCEIVED BY EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Title of current position _____

Number of teachers in district _____

PART I

Please rate each of the following characteristics, competencies, abilities by circling the appropriate number with 1 being low and 5 being high.

	PRE-1983 GRADUATES	POST-1988 GRADUATES
	L H	L H
1. Possess a thorough understanding of the nature and structure of relevant subject matter.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. Individualize instruction through appropriate materials, content, activities and goals in accordance with each student's learning needs.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3. Organize the classroom to create a positive climate for student learning by maintaining a productive focus.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Model and expect from students the correct usage of standard English in writing and speaking.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5. Provide enrichment within courses taught and/or in curricular areas.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6. Demonstrate skill in working with students and parents of different cultures or races.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7. Teach critical thinking and problem solving skills.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8. Establish high expectations for students which are predicated on a conviction that <u>all</u> students can learn.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9. Motivate <u>all</u> students to their maximum potential.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

PART II

From the previous 9 statements, please list in rank order, by using the appropriate number, 1-9, the three greatest strengths and the three most serious weaknesses for each group of teachers.

PRE-1983 GRADUATES		POST-1988 GRADUATES	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Compared to beginning teachers in 1983, today's first-year teachers are:

_____ 1. Much better prepared

_____ 2. Somewhat better prepared

_____ 3. About the same in preparation

_____ 4. Not quite as well prepared

_____ 5. Not nearly as well prepared

PART III

Comments: How would you explain or describe differences between today's first-year teachers and those prepared prior to 1983 in terms of their abilities to teach effectively?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Developed by David England and Arnold Moore for Research Purposes, January, 1991.